



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update

Summer 2004

This is the second in a series of updates about the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and the revision of its comprehensive conservation plan. The *Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan* will provide management guidance and direction for the refuge for the next 15 years.

Progress Report

The *Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan* and *Environmental Impact Statement* for the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is well underway. Over the past year, our interdisciplinary planning team consisting of Fish & Wildlife Service staff from the refuge and regional office and partners from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Department of Natural Resources, has met eight times to work on the revision. Here are a few highlights of our accomplishments:

- We drafted our vision of what the refuge will be in the future and how we will conduct our work.
- We produced a series of goals and objectives to work toward over the life of the plan.
- We hosted five public "open house" meetings in communities on the Kenai Peninsula and in the city of Anchorage to share information about the refuge and to solicit input from the public.
- We analyzed comments from more than 300 public responses that we received during scoping.

The purpose of this *Planning Update* is to give you an opportunity to review and comment on the draft vision and goal statements and on the issues we have identified through scoping. The newsletter will also introduce you to the next phase of the planning process.



Refuge Purposes

The purposes for which Kenai Refuge was established, as identified in Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, are as follows (unless otherwise noted):

- (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity, including, but not limited to, moose, bears, mountain goats, Dall sheep, wolves and other furbearers, salmonoids and other fish, waterfowl and other migratory and nonmigratory birds;
- (ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;
- (iii) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge;
- (iv) to provide in a manner consistent with subparagraphs (i) and (ii), opportunities for scientific research, interpretation, environmental education, and land management training;
- (v) to provide, in a manner compatible with these purposes, opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation; and
- (vi) [*Supplemental Purpose—The Wilderness Act of 1964—Public Law 88-577*] to secure an enduring resource of wilderness, to protect and preserve the wilderness character of areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System, and to administer [the areas] for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.

Our Vision of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge will enhance the quality of life on the Kenai Peninsula by sustaining the ecological integrity of the Cook Inlet basin during threatening global climate change, increasing development, and competing demands for refuge resources. It will be the anchor for biodiversity on the peninsula and will be a haven for all wildlife and habitats native to this phenomenal land we call “The Kenai.”

Refuge staff and partners will work together to employ the best of what science, technology, and human sweat and determination have to offer to ensure that management activities promote biological health and minimize negative human impacts. Together we will achieve excellence in land stewardship, and the refuge and the communities it serves will be recognized throughout the world as leaders in wildlife and wilderness conservation.

We will ensure an enduring legacy of plant and wildlife populations for people to enjoy today and in the future. By means of a wide spectrum of wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, facilities, and interpretive and educational programs that encourage informed and ethical use of the refuge’s natural resources, visitors will feel welcomed and safe and will experience, appreciate, and enjoy the attributes that define Alaska—an abundance of wildlife in a natural setting, breathtaking scenery, and opportunities to experience the Last Frontier.

Goals

The following goals are derived from the vision statement and refuge purposes to reflect the refuge’s contribution to the National Wildlife Refuge System and to reflect other key management responsibilities that stem from law and policy. The *Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan* adopted as a result of this planning effort will work toward meeting all these goals.

Goal 1: Research

Increase our knowledge of fish, wildlife, and plant populations; ecosystems; and dynamic processes on refuge lands and waters.

Goal 2: Conservation and Management

Ensure natural diversity and viability of refuge species, habitats, and ecosystems.

Goal 3: Water Resources

Ensure natural function and condition of water resources necessary to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity.

Goal 4: Training and Education

Natural resource professionals, students, and the visiting public value opportunities to increase their knowledge of refuge ecosystems and management practices.

4.1: Land Management Training

Land managers, scientists, and other partners learn practices and techniques to manage and monitor the boreal forest biome.

4.2: Interpretation and Environmental Education

Diverse audiences understand and appreciate all management programs and support the refuge’s efforts to maintain and enhance wildlife populations and habitats.

Goal 5: Cultural Resources

Alaskans and other visitors appreciate conservation of cultural and archaeological resources.

Goal 6: Wildlife-Dependent Recreation

Visitors of all skills and abilities enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities in safe and secure settings.

Goal 7: Facilities

Visitors and refuge personnel value and enjoy safe, well-maintained facilities and quality programs.

Goal 8: Resource Assessment

People appreciate the integrity of ecological systems and special designated areas and that cultural, historic, and wilderness values are protected and unimpaired for future generations.

Goal 9: Partnerships

People and resources will benefit from stewardship activities developed through partnership efforts.

Public Scoping

What is “Scoping”?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) defines scoping as “. . . an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues.” The scoping process provides a forum for recognizing public and agency concerns that help guide development of refuge comprehensive conservation plans and the environmental analysis of actions identified in them.

In an effort to recruit public involvement in the planning process, we published our Notice of Intent to initiate public scoping in the *Federal Register* on November 26, 2003 (Volume 68, Number 228, pp. 66476-66478). In December 2003, we distributed a planning newsletter and an Issues Workbook, for your voluntary use, to submit comments about the refuge and how it is being managed. We also established an e-mail address specifically for the Kenai planning effort and advertised it as a means for submitting comments.

Additionally, we organized five public open-house meetings and advertised them in local newspapers and through direct mail to more than 3,100 individuals nationwide. Announcements were also made at local community meetings and during interviews conducted by the refuge manager on local radio broadcasts. Reconstruction of the USFWS’s Web site did not permit us to use that means to advertise the events.

Public Response

One hundred people attended public open-house meetings. The Soldotna and Anchorage meetings had the greatest attendance with 34 and 29 participants, respectively. More than half of the 313 responses received during scoping were generated during these meetings.

Responses were submitted to the Service by various methods, including mail, e-mail, telephone, and fax. Verbal responses were

transcribed by Service personnel at open-house meetings and when comments were received by telephone. The majority of responses came in the form of Issues Workbooks, issues sheets, and other written formats. Responses that came in the form of Issues Workbooks typically contained numerous comments about a variety of topics.

Eighty-eight percent of the responses came from Alaska residents with 68 percent of those coming from residents living on the Kenai Peninsula, 30 percent coming from the city of Anchorage, and 2 percent coming from other Alaska communities. Three percent of all responses came from the lower 48 states; the remaining nearly 10 percent did not indicate where they were from. Three statewide or regional organizations, four local businesses, three national environmental conservation organizations, and one Alaska Native tribe submitted comments.

While many of the responses echoed similar concerns, it should be noted that compiling public statements is not the same as counting votes. Public statements are gathered to identify potential planning issues, and each comment holds equal importance. For a summary of our analysis of comments gathered during public scoping please refer to the *Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan Scoping Comments Summary*, available for download as “Summary of Public

Comments on Issues” at <http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/kenpol.htm>.

What We Heard Values

The Issues Workbook contained a number of questions giving the public an opportunity to identify what they value about the Kenai Refuge. Many people who commented indicated they are frequent users, and more than half indicated they visit the refuge more than 20 times a year. Nearly 20 percent of the respondents indicated fishing was a favorite activity while visiting the Refuge; hiking and hunting followed closely behind (15% and 14% respectively). Following are the four most commonly identified public values:

- Wilderness and Wilderness-like Recreation Settings—People highly value the undeveloped character of the refuge as a setting for their recreational activities.
- Access for Recreation Activities—Variations on the theme of recreational access, including access that is “close to home,” was a common response.
- Facilities—Although primitive settings were frequently cited as important attributes of the refuge, respondents also commented favorably on existing facilities.
- Wildlife Conservation and Habitat Protection—Respondents indicated they valued the refuge’s role in conserving fish, wildlife, and habitats.



Summary of Comments

Public comments covered a broad spectrum of concerns ranging from access to wildlife-viewing opportunities. We identified and categorized 32 different concerns into six topic areas.

The planning team reviewed the concerns identified during scoping with the management concerns identified by refuge staff to identify the planning issues that will be addressed in the alternatives developed for analysis in the

Revised Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

Although all issues identified during scoping that are relevant to the planning process will be addressed in the revised plan, five issues were identified as “significant” (i.e., issues that can be addressed by using different actions in different alternatives). Many of the other issues identified will be addressed as part of the management direction common to all alternatives.

Topic Area Concern	Topic Area Concern
<p>Access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Motorized Vehicles</i> <i>Nonmotorized Vehicles</i> <i>Private Inholdings</i> <p>Facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Cabins/Campgrounds/Campsites</i> <i>Linear Features (Roads, Trails, Pipelines)</i> <i>Parking/Pullouts</i> <i>Restrooms</i> <i>Signs</i> <p>Recreation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Collection of Natural Objects</i> <i>Education/Interpretation</i> <i>Fishing</i> <i>Increased Use</i> <i>Trapping</i> <i>Trash</i> <i>Wildlife Viewing</i> 	<p>Crowding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Kenai River</i> <i>Canoe Trail System</i> <p>Oil & Gas Infrastructure/Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Development/Production</i> <i>Future Use of Facilities</i> <i>Remediation/Restoration</i> <p>Wildlife/Habitat Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Beetle Kill</i> <i>Commercial Fishing</i> <i>Consumptive Uses</i> <i>Fire (Prescribed Burn & Wildfire)</i> <i>Fish Populations</i> <i>Law Enforcement</i> <i>Non-native Species</i> <i>Subsistence</i> <i>Wilderness Quality/Character</i> <i>Wildlife</i> <i>Wildlife Habitat</i>



Significant Issues

The five significant issues we identified are listed below. After each issue, we briefly describe the range of comments we received. Please keep in mind the following questions as you read over them: Have we interpreted your comments accurately? Is there something you think we missed in our analysis?

Issue 1: How will the refuge balance motorized and nonmotorized use with resource and visitor experience protection?

What we heard: Concerns about various motorized and nonmotorized issues were raised during scoping. Comments were primarily focused on access by snowmachines, airplanes, and nonmotorized wheeled

Comprehensive Conservation Plan in 1985 and that such use has had an impact on refuge resources and visitor experiences. The Kenai River corridor and Swanson River and Swan Lake Canoe System were specifically identified as areas in need of additional management. Many respondents suggested that current restrictions on Kenai River use are insufficient to protect resources and visitor safety and experiences. Comments cited litter, human waste, development of ad hoc campsites, bank degradation, and impacts to wildlife as issues we should address.

Issue 3: How will the refuge enhance wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities?



vehicles (e.g., bikes, game carts, strollers) and on resource and visitor experience protection.

Issue 2: How will the refuge manage increasing public use to ensure resource and visitor experience protection?

What we heard: Increasing public use of the refuge was one of the most common issues identified in public comments. There is a general feeling that refuge use has grown substantially since the development of the original

Refuge staff see the need to explore alternatives in the draft plan that enhances wildlife-viewing opportunities in the Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area. They are also interested in exploring alternative approaches to allow personal use and collection of natural resource items, including berries, mushrooms, and antlers, activities which are currently prohibited by refuge regulation.

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Significant Issues

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Issue 4: How will the refuge address large-scale habitat changes (e.g., aging forests, beetle-killed trees)?

What we heard: Fire suppression and constraints on the use of prescribed fire in designated Wilderness have reduced the proportion of early-stage habitats. Some respondents called for increased use of fire to enhance habitat and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on the Kenai Peninsula. Others expressed concern about the risks to life and property.

Issue 5: How will the refuge manage existing facilities for public use while ensuring resource protection?

What we heard: Comments regarding facilities were mixed, with some respondents concerned about insufficient or deteriorating facilities and others concerned about modifications that change the character of the refuge. Respondents provided a variety of comments about trails that related to planning, development, and maintenance. Respondents also commented on the need for improved and/or additional parking and pullout areas and maintained roads;

others commented on how such developments have changed the character of the refuge and have had impacts on refuge resources. Respondents also commented on oil and gas fields located on the refuge. Many were concerned about further exploration and development; some supported such activities. Comments also indicated an interest in having abandoned oil and gas sites fully or partially restored for wildlife purposes and in using associated facilities (e.g., roads, buildings, and bridges) for recreation and research purposes.

Common Management Direction and Land Management Categories

During the past several years, the Service has compiled, in consultation with other Service programs and the State of Alaska, a set of common management policies and guidelines that guide activities and uses on all refuges in Alaska, including the Kenai Refuge. We will be looking at the common management direction as part of this planning process to see what elements should be adapted by the refuge. If you are interested in learning more about how we manage Alaska refuges, you may request a hard copy or CD-ROM disk of the Common Management Direction from Ken_W_Rice@fws.gov or via phone at (907) 786-3502.

Lands within Kenai Refuge are currently identified by five land-management categories. Land management categories are used to define access, activities, and facilities appropriate for an area of the refuge. Several of the land-management categories in the current plan—for example the “Traditional Management” category—do not appear to be necessary and/or are in need of revision. We will be looking at consolidating and making changes to the current management categories as part of this planning process.

Issues Outside the Scope of this Planning Effort

Several concerns that were identified during scoping will not be addressed as issues in the *Revised Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*: hunting, subsistence, cabins, and Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River designations. These activities and/or management actions are either mandated by law (e.g., the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act) or are being addressed by other planning efforts (e.g., *Environmental Assessment of Cabin Management on the Kenai NWR*). Additional concerns identified during scoping may be placed in this category after further evaluation by the planning team.



Next Steps – Development of Management Alternatives

Once the planning team receives your comments on the vision and goal statements and the list of issues the plan will address, it will begin developing a range of management alternatives. Alternatives define management options and provide a basis for comparing the impacts and effects of various approaches. Several alternatives will probably be generated, including a “no action” alternative, which preserves existing management and provides an environmental baseline against which impacts of other alternatives will be compared. We will solicit your comments on the draft management alternatives via our next planning newsletter which is scheduled for release this fall. After revisions are made to the management alternatives based upon your input, we will host public meetings in Anchorage and Soldotna to review them again before they are incorporated into the draft plan.

How You Can Help

We are grateful to those who participated during the scoping period and encourage you to stay engaged in the process. Your input is invaluable! Please consider providing comment on the vision and goal statements and the list of issues the revised plan will address as identified in this planning newsletter. To help us stay on schedule, please submit your comments by **August 20, 2004**.

How to Contact Us

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Steps of the Planning Process

